

State Representative Matt Pierce

113th Indiana General Assembly, Spring 2004

Session Report



Expanding Economic
Opportunity



Helping
Consumers



Improving
Fire Safety





113th General Assembly Ends



STATE OF INDIANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Dear Friend,

I am sending this report on the recently-concluded "short session" of the Indiana General Assembly to help you keep informed about the legislature's activities. While it was temporarily swamped by election-year politics, the General Assembly did rally to pass some significant new laws.

Among the 98 bills Governor Kernan signed into law was legislation that creates and preserves jobs in Indiana, better protects children and seniors from abuse, combats predatory lending in the home loan market, and addresses the high cost of prescription drugs. Most laws will become effective on July 1, although some have been given earlier effective dates to address more immediate problems. You can learn more about the new laws by visiting the state's web site at www.in.gov/legislative/.

Despite these successes, I am disappointed the General Assembly failed to enact Governor Kernan's early learning initiative. The proposal would have made voluntary full-day kindergarten available throughout Indiana. Experts agree that early education is a sound, necessary investment in our future. I supported enacting full-day kindergarten now because each year of delay is another year when Indiana's children miss the opportunity to get a better education.

Full-day kindergarten will be just one of the important issues waiting for the General Assembly when it reconvenes in January. This summer, several committees will explore ways to streamline local governments and reduce their dependence on property taxes. A committee of private citizens is already studying how state government can be made more efficient. The legislature will also have to adopt a new two-year budget with limited revenues caused by the struggling economy.

These are significant challenges. But they also create the opportunity to make meaningful reforms that could lead to better delivery of government services and a better value for the taxpayer's dollar.

I look forward to hearing your views about these issues and hope you will not hesitate to contact me if I can ever help you in any way.

Sincerely,

Pierce, Simpson Team Up to Pass Important Safety Legislation

I was pleased to be the House sponsor of Senator Vi Simpson's bill to enact strong **safety standards for indoor pyrotechnics** used during public performances. You might recall that last year 100 people were killed in a Rhode Island nightclub fire after indoor fireworks used as part of a musical performance sparked a catastrophic fire. Senate Bill 326 puts in place National Fire Protection Association safety standards for indoor pyrotechnics displays in Indiana. It also ensures local fire chiefs have the opportunity to check the safety of indoor displays before performances.

The bill passed the Senate and the House Insurance, Corporations and Small Business Committee. However, because political gridlock prevented the House from

conducting business for several days, I had to find a way to revive the bill. I persuaded the author of legislation with a related subject to request a conference committee so SB 326 could be added to it. Senator Simpson was able to convince the Senate leadership to allow the addition to the bill. The conference report for House Bill 1019 was adopted with the provisions from SB 326 and has now been signed into law by Governor Kernan.

This important legislation **will go a long way toward preventing a catastrophe in our own community** like the one that occurred in Rhode Island. It is a good example of how teamwork and determination in the legislature can lead to a positive result for Indiana's citizens.

Creating Greater Economic Opportunity

Two bills I cosponsored to boost small businesses developing new technologies became law as part of House Bill 1365. The first bill's provision creates the **Emerging Technology Grant Fund** to assist small technology businesses to compete nationally for federal research and development awards and provide matching grants. The goal of the fund is to **accelerate commercialization of emerging technologies**.

The second bill I cosponsored that is contained in HB 1365 establishes a grant office to work with state and federal agencies, local governments, colleges and universities and the private sector to assist in the devel-

opment of research and development grant proposals. The office would help identify potential grants and assist with the often difficult task of writing grant proposals.

HB1365 also makes the state's research and development tax credit permanent and extends the life of the Hoosier Business Investment Tax Credit.

House Bill 1434 is another important economic development law. It establishes a microenterprise partnership program to provide grants to community-based or nonprofit organizations for the purpose of **providing business development services and loans** to businesses with fewer than five employees.

The law also creates the State Technology Advancement and Retention (STAR) account to **advance technology and retain graduates in Indiana**. The account would hold federal grants, donations and any state appropriations for school to career programs, apprenticeships, internships and economic development programs.

These new laws build on the General Assembly's passage in 2003 of the "Energize Indiana" economic growth program. This long-term, strategic plan to diversify Indiana's economy stresses investing in people through education and recognizes the important roles colleges and universities can play in creating jobs in new industries.





Representative Matt Pierce addresses the House of Representatives during the 2004 session.

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Pierce Bill to Help Water Utility Consumers Signed into Law

Governor Kernan has signed into law House Bill 1293 that gives city water utilities the authority to reduce charges for high water consumption when the consumer is unaware a leak is causing the increased water usage.

I authored this legislation to correct a problem brought to my attention

by a member of our community. His water bill was unusually high because of an unknown, underground leak. When he asked the city to adjust the bill since he did not actually use the water, he was told to appeal his bill with the Utility Services Board. When he followed that advice, he was then told state law prevented the board from adjusting his bill.

I think it is only fair to give water customers a break when an unusually large bill is caused by something beyond their control. Bloomington Mayor Mark Kruzan and City Utilities Director Patrick Murphy supported my effort to clarify the law so they can assist customers in this kind of situation.



Rep. Matt Pierce

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